

Let's turn together this morning as we look together at God's word in this series in Advent on God With Us, as we have been looking together during our worship services with the Advent wreath, the reading from the Gospel narratives of Christ's birth, and then dedicating the time of preaching to Paul's teaching on the nature of Christ---who he is, his incarnation, his life, his death, his glorification---through his letters to the churches. Last week we were in Colossians. This week we are in Philippians. And next week Pastor Flora will lead us in the book of Galatians.

So this morning, if you have your Bibles with you, you can turn to Philippians, the second chapter, and then if you do not have your Bibles it's certainly there for you in the screens....in the screens....on the screens (it's not The Matrix). We're going to be looking, then, at Philippians 2:1-11, as this has made up a great part of the church's proclamation in song of the nature and person and work of Christ. And it is given to us in such a beautiful method---may God even bless the reading of his Word, that he would set before us such a glorious picture of Christ our Lord. Hear now God's Word, Philippians 2:1-11.

If you have any encouragement from being united with Christ, if any comfort from his love, if any fellowship with the Spirit, if any tenderness and compassion, then make my joy complete by being like-minded, having the same love, being one in spirit and purpose. Do nothing out of selfish ambition or vain conceit, but in humility consider others better than yourselves. Each of you should look not only to your own interests, but also to the interests of others. Your attitude should be the same as that Christ Jesus: Who, being in very nature God, did not consider equality with God something to be grasped, but made himself nothing, taking the very nature of a servant, being made in human likeness. And being found in appearance as a man, he humbled himself and became obedient to death---even death on a cross. Therefore God exalted him to the highest place and gave him the name that is above every name, that at the name of Jesus every knee should bow, in heaven and on earth and under the earth, and every tongue confess that Jesus Christ is Lord, to the glory of God the Father.

This is the word of God. Thanks be to God. Will you pray with me. Heavenly Father, we pray this morning that you would open our eyes that we would see such a beautiful picture of who Christ is. So may you set him before us---through your Word and by the power of your Spirit---such a sterling, glorious, wonderful picture of the humility of Christ for our salvation, for your glory in the church and in the world. In Jesus' name we pray. Amen.

Paul gives us this passage, verses 1-11, he gives us two segments. He gives us first verses 1-5 of what it looks like for the Christian to have life in Christ. And then that is built on both the example, but also the source of that life in Christ, which is the life of Christ in verses 6-11.

His intention is to give this message to the church. The church is to be made up of those who make profession of faith in Jesus Christ, who trust in him alone. But it is not merely an assent to a group of spiritual doctrines, but it is a belief in the life and work of Jesus Christ. And when we are united to Christ through the work and presence of his Holy Spirit, God gives us encouragement---literally giving us courage, giving us strength to live with one another. Because flowing out of a relationship with Christ, through the Word and the Spirit working together, is the source for all that we need. So therefore he sets out and calls Christians to live this kind of life in Christ. So let's look at together, then, this brief list here of some of the ways that the life in Christ is to look like.

He tells us in verses 1-5, first we'll see in verse 2, where he says to them---picking up from verse 1: If any comfort from his love, if any fellowship with the Spirit, if any tenderness and compassion. So to know Christ is to be united to him by faith. Based on the grace of God in Christ, we receive the

person and work of God in the Holy Spirit. And therefore, when a person becomes a believer they receive the Holy Spirit, and through the Spirit they receive comfort and encouragement. Then, therefore, he says: Then make my joy complete. And when he says, "If you receive these things..." it's not as though some Christians receive them and some don't. It is axiomatic for Paul that to claim Christ as Savior, to be united to him---this is the case. You receive the courage, you receive the comfort, you receive the tenderness, you receive the love, you receive participation in God's Spirit.

He says then, therefore, as one teaching the church he says, "Make my joy complete." His joy, he's telling us, is built up when he sees Christ being lived out among Christians with one another. And he describes it. He says: Being like-minded, having the same love, being one in spirit and purpose. He talks about first love. And it isn't the way in which we typically, that is culturally, speak on in regard to love. By this kind of love, Paul is not referring to the modern ways of speaking about love, that is, one that is principally the product of feeling. Or warm fuzzies. Or attraction. Love in its purest, most biblical sense, is most demonstrated not by feeling or attraction to someone that you particularly like. Love is demonstrated when we love even our enemies. When love is demonstrated not by the result of feelings, but demonstrated by an act of choice and of the will.

Gordon Fee, a New Testament scholar, writes this in regard to the fruit of love in the Christian. He says, love is therefore not something that one can do or feel on one's own. It is not a version of good feelings towards someone, so that love is turned in on itself. Rather, this kind of love is turned on its head. It is to be characterized by self-sacrificial giving, in spite of yourself. Love heads the list of Paul's virtues over against the works of the flesh. In other words, the fruit of love through the Spirit in the life of the Christian and among Christians is to itself spell the end to hostilities, strife, jealousy, outbursts of rage, selfish ambitions, dissensions, factions, envies. This can only be lived out in the context of other people. Paul gives this demonstration of what his joy will be made complete in, not by saying, well, go off in your own little private sphere and learn love. No, it's love demonstrated in relationship, and isn't that the most difficult thing to do?!

Paul doesn't mean, therefore, that love lived out in relationships is always a product of feelings. It's not that love can never be the product of feeling, but this kind of love is often not formed by feeling. It is formed by choice. Because we're called into relationship in the body of Christ with people who don't look like us, people whose personalities are quite different than ours, backgrounds that are different, races that are different, socioeconomic levels are different. What's demonstrated as love among Christians is the fact, principally, that we don't get along naturally. And that in every other sphere, we would not have any other reason to hang out with other. But because of Christ, we come from all hosts of backgrounds. And frankly, when we're honest, we annoy each other, do we not. Do we not? You can laugh. That's all right, I know you do. I know you annoy each other. I know I annoy you. But you never annoy me, I promise.

But the reality of love is this. It's lived out among a group of people. And the life of love is demonstrated based on the love that we have received from Christ. While we were yet his enemies, Christ died for us. Holy love is not demonstrated by God holding all the love up there. It is demonstrated in God with us, in the flesh.

But Paul goes on. He demonstrates also that not only are we called to lives in Christ that are marked by love, but also with humility. Verse 3. Do nothing out of selfish ambition or vain conceit, but in humility consider others better than yourselves. It is not this. Paul is not saying to us that we are to look at ourselves and think of ourselves as worthless. But rather he recognizes that we are all made in God's image. Each and every one of us has our own dignity. But his point is that when the humility of the Christian is demonstrated, it looks like this. It's not that I don't have any interests any longer---it's that I do not consider my interests in a vacuum. I'm in relationship with other people. And so therefore it's not about my desires, first and foremost. Because when I consider my desires first and

foremost, and those desires become frustrated, then strife and broken relationships break out. This is James's teaching in his letter. Why do we war and argue and get angry at one another? Because we have desires that go unmet, and, quite frankly, we begin to point the finger at one another. But the opposite of that, he's telling us, is in the humility, considering the fact that my interests are not the only ones in the room---in fact they're not even the most important ones in the room----somebody else's are.

And that is to be lived out in our midst, but also as the Christian goes out into the world. Let me use a very basic, everyday experience. We go to the grocery store, and the person who is the clerk or someone working at the grocery store or wherever it is you might go. And someone...you go up, you're ready to spend money, and they're cold, they're short, they're mean or whatever---short not in height but in attitude. And they're clearly not having a good day and they let you know it. You come away from that interaction and you think...Well, what's their problem?!? How many of you have not been on 108 or one of our highways and been in your car and not thought...Do you need a red carpet? Get out of the way! Right? Everyday life is made up of these small interactions, where, when we're honest, we recognize actually plays an undercurrent of attitude that is subtly there and then propped up by the world we live in: What is most important is you. But Paul is calling us that the life in Christ is the other way around. That maybe what's going on in that grocery store clerk's life is something that I can't physically see in that moment, but were I to know it---and she were to tell me---how tempted would I be to call her aside and just pray for her. And maybe the life of love is to begin thinking about---instead of how they didn't meet my interests or your interests---how can I be praying for theirs. It is so hard.

But he continues. He tells us about self-sacrifice. Verse 4. He says: Each of you should look not only to your own interests, but also to the interests of others. And in this laying down of our interests is the act of self-sacrifice, the saying no to ourselves, but asking another, What is going on with you? How can I serve you?

The challenge for us continues when he says that this is to be a life characterized by unity. So all of us as Christians who profess Christ come together, and we're to live lives characterized by participating in union and faith in Jesus Christ, who receive the Holy Spirit, and our life together is to be characterized by love and humility and self-sacrifice. And then he says, "Your attitude should be the same as that of Christ Jesus." So he says not only should our actions but our attitudes, and sort of circling back to where he began, he said our life together is to be united with Christ, and therefore we are to be like-minded, having the same love, being of one spirit and one purpose. I mean that... that is so devastating to read in its convicting power.

And then to top it off, he says the example to follow is that of Christ. And it leaves you undone. In fact, not only does it leave us undone, it leaves us undone to the point where at times it's very tempting to want to say, okay, then what do I need to change? What do I need to work on?

I was sent this reflection from Paul Tripp this week---he's a pastor and counselor---as he writes on this very issue of the conundrum that we find ourselves in. That conundrum is what Paul is expressing is the work of Christ. That when one believes in the Lord Jesus Christ and is united to him in his Spirit and receives the blessing and the gift of salvation, then we are no longer in bondage to sin. Its power, which is death---spiritual death---no longer has a hold on the Christian, but the presence of sin is very much a reality. And so we hear Paul's teaching about what should characterize the life in Christ, and it's very easy to fall into the trap of thinking, okay, well then what I need to do is change this behavior, this thing, that thing. Tripp leads us in this thinking when he says this. He says the presence of sin still remains. A war rages on the turf of your heart every day. There are times when you love God more than yourself, but not always. There are times when you sacrifice and love your spouse, but not always. There times when you are generous with your resources, but

not always. There are times when you speak from a pure heart, but not always. So what's the solution? he asks. Here's the trap that you and I fall into all the time---and that is thinking that with a little bit of behavior reform we can clean things up. Try a little harder. He says the problem is, the Bible doesn't propose that we try a little behavior modification. He says all throughout Scripture our greatest problem is not first and foremost of behavior. It is our heart problem. The heart is the control center of the human being. Whatever controls my heart will then control my behavior. A temporary solution might be to alter my words and my behavior, but permanent change will only travel through the pathway of the heart.

So Paul never gives us this instruction and never gives us the example of Christ and then says, okay, get busy. He doesn't guilt us into it. He draws us again and again---to not just the example of Christ, but Christ as the source of life, which is why he then goes into this hymn of Christ in verses 6-11.

And in 6-11 he unfolds for us the life of Christ. So I want to say as I walk through this quickly with the snow falling outside, I want to remind you that the reason why we celebrate the incarnation is because we all needed a person to come into the world as we did. Born as an infant. Raised into a child, into adolescence, into adulthood. And to do so as us, as a man, but without sin. It isn't that our salvation is based on only what Christ has done for us on the cross---it's everything he also lived leading up to the cross.

And so the life of Christ that he unpacks for us here is glorious in its beauty. He begins with the incarnation, verses 6-7. And when he says these words: Christ Jesus, who, being in the very nature God, did not consider equality with God something to be grasped---he is using a profound Greek concept. And that concept points to the fact that Jesus didn't just become---Jesus was and always has been and always will be. He says: Who being in the very nature God---he's using the word being there...it's a Greek word *morphe*. But it doesn't mean what we oftentimes think of: changing or morphing or something---there's another Greek word for things that change, for example, as we grow up from infants to adulthood. That's called something else. That's not the word *morphe*. Rather the word used there is *schema*. [I had it in my notes, thank you.] *Schema* is what we use to describe that which changes about us as we grow. But *morphe* refers to our intrinsic nature. And that Christ himself intrinsically was God, is God, and will always be God.

And so therefore when he tells us "Who being in the very nature God," he then says something else. Not only was he God, he says "He did not consider equality with God something to be grasped." The image there is that he didn't see equality with God something to cling to, to hold onto, that he would not let go of. So what he's suggesting there is that in the incarnation Christ willingly gave up all the glory, all the incredible nature of being in Trinitarian relationship with the Father and the Spirit in heaven---he gave that up, that glory. He didn't give up his divine nature, he gave up the glory associated with it.

And he made himself...became the likeness of man, taking the form of a servant. This is the nature of the incarnation. He didn't begrudgingly come. He didn't sit up there on high and say, I'm going to keep the love of God up here. But rather it was demonstrated by letting go of the glory which was due to him, which he deserved.

And he tells us in this next idea, verse 7: But made himself nothing, taking the very nature of a servant, being made in human likeness. He was known for his humility. He made himself nothing. He didn't come down and make himself a child born into an aristocratic family---for there were many. There was a lot of power. He wasn't born in the seat of power. He was born in a bad neighborhood to a poor family under the threat of execution. To be known first as a servant.

Dorothy Sayers, a great Catholic writer, but also just a wonderful writer for the entire Christian family, says this when she reflects on the nature of Christ's humility. Speaking of Christ she says, He can exact nothing from man that he has not exacted from himself. He has himself gone through the whole of human experience from the trivial irritations of family life and the cramping restrictions of hard work and lack of money to the worst horrors of pain and humiliation, defeat, despair and death. When he was a man he played the man. He was born in poverty and died in disgrace and thought it well worthwhile.

He willingly gave up his glory because of the worthwhile nature of fulfilling the will of God, to make known the love of God, to be poured out for sinners.

But Paul goes beyond just humility. He says, And being found in appearance as a man, he humbled himself and became obedient to death---even death on a cross. You see there would be some who would have us believe that what we need to focus on is the poverty of Christ and how he made himself known among the poor. Yes, and amen. But Paul does not allow us simply to stay there as if the point of Jesus' coming was to demonstrate that he came with empty pockets and nothing but rabbit ears. It isn't just that Jesus came to the poor and to the downtrodden and made his life among them, or was born to a poor family. Yes, all of that. But ultimately his humility is demonstrated into the depth of that humility, and that is his self-sacrifice where he says, "Even..." at the end of verse 8--- "Even death on cross."

On one level, it would be enough---as it seems to---to be born as God's Son, knowing all the glory and all the honor and yet just live a poor life. But Paul tells us that living a poor man's life would not have solved our need for a new heart. Someone needed to pay the price for our sin, and so, he tells us, "He became obedient to death---even death on a cross."

I'll be honest with you, I've used that phrase I don't know how many times. And it becomes a part of our Christian speech. And we sing of it, as we should. But it is particularly at Christmas, and not just Easter, when we must remember that his incarnation had in view his resurrection, which means it had in view the cross. Which is why Paul declares it here. The incarnation was for the purpose of going to the cross.

And it is in that place that I want to share with you this reflection. Rob Rayburn, commenting on this very idea, writes these words. You cannot measure the suffering of Christ or the enormity of the punishment he endured by the pain of the nails in his hands and feet or the terrible thirst that was one of the worst features of crucifixion. His suffering can be measured only by the distance that separated the ignominy, the shame, the mockery, that desolation, that physical torture, from the perfection, the glory, the infinite love and joy that was the life of the Son of God in fellowship with the Trinity before he came into the world. To travel from the paradise of Trinitarian joy and glory to Calvary, to be spit upon and murdered by profane and evil men---that is the humiliation of the Son of God. To travel from infinite and perfect love to complete forsakenness and abandonment---that is the humiliation of Jesus Christ.

Jesus became man, took the form of a servant, lived among the poor as a poor man, but go to the ultimate form of humility and that is sacrifice himself---even to death on a cross. And that punishment was particularly saved for those who were considered the most heinous. To go from Trinitarian glory to that is the nature of the incarnation. It is Christ whose life and whose death is the source of our new heart and the empowerment behind seeing him as the example.

So Paul ends here by saying, Therefore, because of this kind of incarnation, this life, God himself "exalted him to the highest place and gave him the name that is above every name, that at the name

of Jesus every knee should bow, in heaven and on earth and under the earth, and every tongue confess that Jesus Christ is Lord, to the glory of God the Father.”

Jesus, in his incarnation, letting go of the glory to do the will of his Father was doing so not even for his glory, but the glory of his Father. The glory of our Savior will be recognized on that day whether you are a believer or not. Every knee, either by choice or by the force of the fearsome, awesome glory of God, every knee shall bow and every tongue will confess that he is Lord.

But the message of Christmas, the message of the incarnation, is that he means for us to receive that new heart which he came to give us. Because when he was raised on the third day, victorious over sin and death---there we can find the pathway to the new heart, to the new life. There we find the pathway by God's Spirit to being united to Christ. So therefore he can be simultaneously the example for the individual Christian---you! But also the example for his church. Because he is also the source of it. His life, his glory. Humbled in the incarnation. God with us. That we would be made a people who are called, then, to love, to forgive, to be of the same mind, the same purpose, asking and caring for your interests before our own.

But that is absolutely devastating and impossible without the new heart and the new life that is given to us in Christ. It is not that we will leave this place and we will not offend each other. Surely we will before the day is out. Some of you will be in an argument. Some of you will turn out the light tonight ready to read each other the riot act. The issue is not whether that will happen. Sin is still present with us. But what will we receive in the incarnation, what is offered to us is the pathway through difficulty, through the presence of sin to the power of victory, reconciliation, and forgiveness and love. For God's glory, for our good. Amen?

Let's pray. Heavenly Father, I thank you for your Word that calls us to such deep love. But in the call to us to this deep love it exposes our profoundly selfish love. We cannot do this unless you demonstrate to us again by the power of your Spirit and your Word this morning that the only source for a new heart and new life is in Christ alone. Lord, may you do this in us, and may we be a people characterized by these things for your glory. And this morning we proclaim that Jesus Christ is Lord. Have mercy on us, O Lord. In Jesus' name. Amen.